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MAPU TALES

FLYING
OVER
FLAMES



FOUNDERS AND EDITORS OF THE MAGAZINE:

JOANNA AND BJÖRN POLLUL
MAPUTALES@GMAIL.COM

AUTHORS OF THE ISSUE:

JOANNA POLLUL
BJÖRN POLLUL
KAT MAZURKIEWICZ
DÉBORA LARA SALVATIERRA
SZADAM
KLAUS DONAT
MARTIN SZILAGYI
BARTOSZ WAROT

DESIGN PHOTOS:

JOANNA POLLUL
KAT MAZURKIEWICZ
DÉBORA LARA SALVATIERRA
MARTIN SZILAGYI
BARTOSZ WAROT

PHOTO OF THE ISSUE:

MARTIN SZILAGYI



ENJOY!

FROM THE EDITORS



We've been asked, what is **MAPU TALES**? We're happy to share the story behind this little mystery.

MAPU — a word from the Mapudungun language spoken by the Mapuche people of southern Chile and Argentina — means “land” or “earth.” It speaks to roots, belonging, and the deep connection we have to the places we travel, live, and explore.

MAPU TALES are tales of the earth. It is a space for sharing stories—whether travel experiences, practical tips, or sports adventures—that often go unnoticed in the rush of everyday life.

In a world that never stops scrolling, take a moment to pause—and give yourself the space for a slower, more thoughtful read. On that note, we invite you to explore the stories we've gathered. The journey of preparing and printing a magazine is no small feat, but with creativity, stamina, and your support, we continue to make it happen—page by page.

JOANNA & BJÖRN POLLUL

TO HELP US CREATE MORE ISSUES GO HERE



PHOTO OF THE ISSUE



THE OCEAN IS WHERE THE MAGIC LIVES—
ITS DEEP BLUE DEPTHS HOLD MORE LIFE
THAN WE CAN EVER KNOW

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BETWEEN BEARS AND VOLCANOES

KLAUS DONAT & MARTIN SZILAGYI



A JOURNEY THROUGH WILD KAMCHATKA

In the far east of Siberia—at the proverbial end of the world—lies the Kamchatka Peninsula. Perhaps it's a good thing that the journey there is so long—spanning ten time zones—so that this destination, still considered an insider tip among traveling flyers, remains as wonderfully remote and pristine as it is today.

Fiery volcanoes and untouched tundra shape this natural paradise, populated by millions of salmon and countless Kamchatka brown bears. With 370,000 square kilometers, Kamchatka is even 5% larger than Germany. The landscape is dominated by erupting volcanoes—nearly 30 of them are active—making this an adventure trip like no other. The highest volcano is Klyuchevskaya Sopka, affectionately called “Klutchy” by us. At 4,750 meters, it's the highest peak in Kamchatka and the object of our flying desire.

THE JOURNEY BEGINS: HELICOPTERS, MOUNTAINS, AND A VOLCANIC BASE CAMP

We're quickly ushered out of the humming helicopter, colorful backpacks in tow. The Mil Mi-8 hovers just above the snow at a saddle at 3,300 meters, at the foot of the mighty volcanoes. Before we know it, the powerful machine vanishes from view. It's silent. In the kitschy blue sky, we see the smoking summit of Klyuchevskaya Sopka seemingly within reach. Awe overtakes the three of us. We stroll toward the wooden hut—a base for volcanologists. The hut is leaky and filled with packed snow up to halfway up the walls. No choice: our bright green expedition tents have to be set up. Though it's still early in the morning, the temperature feels comfortable, and we enjoy our first moments in camp. The tents go up quickly, the first photos are taken, and we already feel almost at home.

But things don't stay cozy for long. We're repeatedly startled by loud crashes—boulders tumbling down the active volcano. Sure, our camp is located in the flatter area of the saddle, but who knows... The white smoke from the crater grows darker, eventually turning the sky black. A sense of unease creeps in... Should we start thinking about a Plan B? What if...? So we decide to scout the area for suitable launch sites, just in case. Worst case scenario: grab our paragliders and flee to the valley. Once our nerves settle—and since no lava starts flowing—we continue with our plan for a short climb on the mountain. I suddenly realize: the higher the mountain, the thinner the air! It starts gradually: the steps grow more labored, the pace slows, and the mountain welcomes us in its own way...

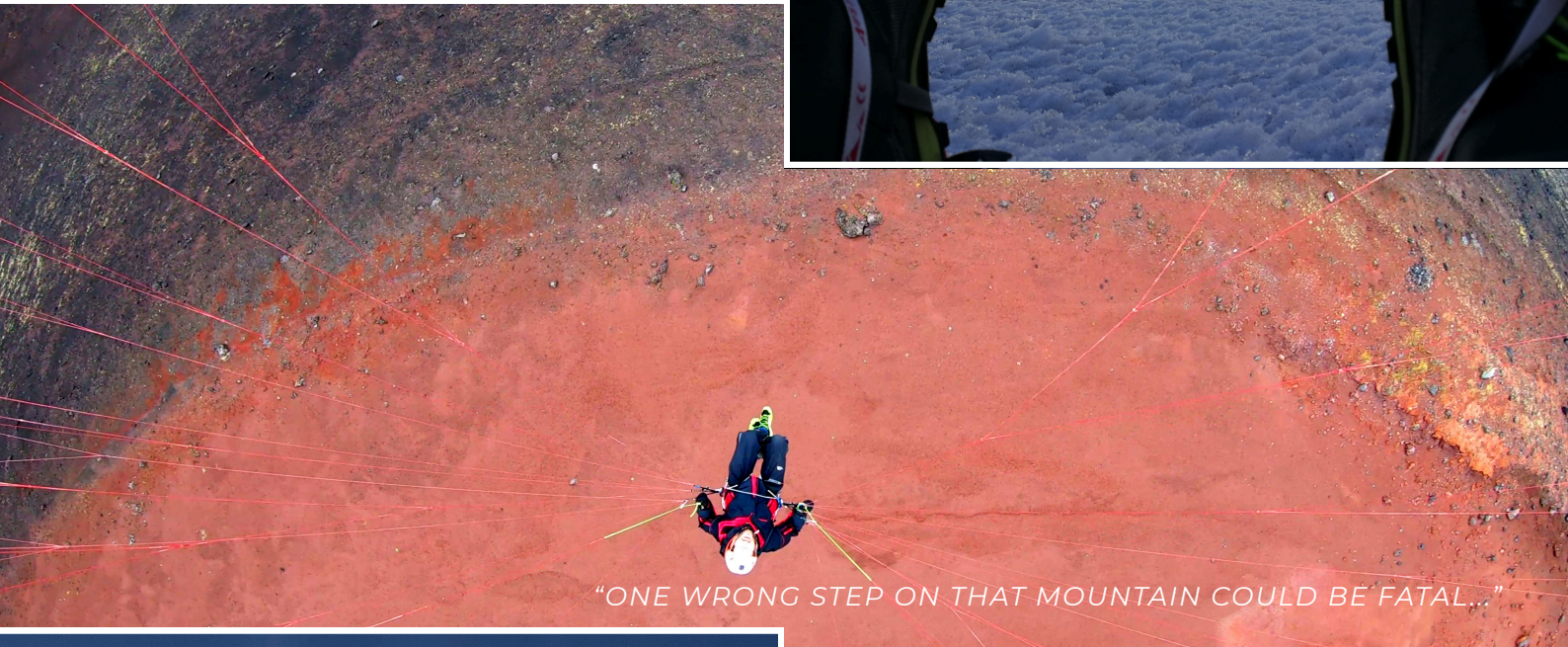


A FIGHT AGAINST ALTITUDE

The next day begins early. The weather forecast doesn't look promising, so we wake at 3 a.m. But everything is slower at this altitude—even simple tasks are more exhausting. In the darkness we set off—"Uncle Düsen" (Christian) in front, me in the middle, and our "media man" Martin in the rear, always filming and photographing. The altitude didn't seem to bother him; in addition to his normal gear, he carried a drone, video camera, GoPro, and still camera. "Never too fast—at this altitude, you won't recover!" My companions' words echo in my mind. I was the slowest, and though I didn't want to hold them back, I also knew I didn't have to reach the summit. If it became too much, I'd simply turn back or fly down. Logical, right? But it turned out differently. After a few hundred meters of ascent, we encountered strong winds from the wrong direction—making any launch from the mountain impossible! The climb was impressive, with bizarre seracs and breathtaking views. The route through ice and rocks was demanding, with no solid rock for belaying. Up to about 4,000 meters, I felt strong and kept pushing upward. But the higher we climbed, the more rockfall we faced. The volcano's activity loosened stones that tumbled dangerously down. Helmets offered little protection—we were well aware.



While one of us kept watch for falling rocks, the other two tried to gain altitude and find cover. Physical exhaustion grew, and tension increased. The summit always seemed within reach. The slope became gentler toward the top, but the ground turned unstable. We were walking on loose volcanic rock, rarely finding solid steps. It got harder and harder for me—every step a struggle. Then, out of nowhere, my companions urged me to launch immediately. “Let’s go to the crater,” I said. “No, you’re launching now. Forget the crater—it doesn’t matter anymore!” I hadn’t noticed: I was showing signs of altitude sickness. Back at camp, they told me I had started rambling incoherently, and they didn’t know how they’d get me back down safely.



“ONE WRONG STEP ON THAT MOUNTAIN COULD BE FATAL...”

A DANGEROUS LAUNCH: TRUSTING EXPERIENCE

I’m a paraglider, not an alpine climber, so I trusted Martin’s instructions completely. The “launch site” was anything but ideal. Strong crosswinds, slippery ground, barely able to stand. That day, my many years of flying experience saved me. With the help of both start assistants, I managed to take off. It wasn’t a clean launch, but thanks to my glider’s short lines, I got airborne, swinging side to side. Once seated, euphoria set in. The view of the mountains and clouds was overwhelming.

I flew over the saddle toward Kamen, the nearly 4,600-meter volcano next to Klutchy. The landing was easy—clouds were just below the pass, and the wind was weaker at lower altitude. I followed all instructions from my friends: rehydrated at camp with tea, soup, and food. I had never tasted an instant meal so delicious!

Only once I rested in my tent did the full reality sink in—I had been in real danger. Emotions overwhelmed me—gratitude flooded me and left me trembling. Then came the fear—how were my companions? Did they make their difficult launches?



THE GLACIER FLIGHT — A RACE AGAINST TIME

The next day, we had to hurry—bad weather was approaching. We broke down camp right after breakfast. Fortune favored us: we found a launch site with light headwind. However, the flight over the glacier seemed nearly impossible—the terrain too flat, and we were each carrying over 30 kilos of gear.



I launched first. My pack pulled me into an extreme recline. The glider sank and sank—just meters above the glacier. Then, a hunch: I veered off course toward dark volcanic rocks. When my variometer beeped, I knew—it might just work! A descent on foot would have been not only exhausting but dangerous. Christian followed me, and together we soared across the glacier, squeezing out every bit of altitude. Miraculously, all three of us landed safely on a glacial moraine—almost unbelievable! What followed was one of the hardest hikes of my life.

We had arranged to meet our guide at a specific GPS coordinate. Martin and Christian left part of their gear at the landing spot—it was just too heavy. The plan: return the next day to retrieve it. By then, I was already exhausted, so the thought of an extra hike didn't appeal. I carried all my gear and struggled for nearly 9 hours to the meeting point. The path involved major elevation changes, marshes, swamps, hours without water—and constant fear of encountering a bear.

"WE WERE ALL SAFE IN CAMP... PURE JOY RUSHED THROUGH US."

ESSO — RIDE AND FLY

After those dramatic days around the volcanoes, we treated ourselves to some downtime. Esso, a small town with hot springs, seemed perfect. All three of us were having trouble walking—knees, shoulders, and backs aching. Soothing soaks in the thermal water helped us recover.

Our guide suggested a horseback tour—the mountains around Esso are ideal. That's when the idea was born: ride and fly! With mosquito nets over our faces, we rode through forests and meadows. After a few hours, we reached a mountain plateau. The wind was perfect—and the rest is easy to tell. Christian practiced landing in a forest clearing, I soared along the edge, and Martin—of course—filmed it all. We capped off the flight with a bath in a hot spring at the landing site—pure luxury!

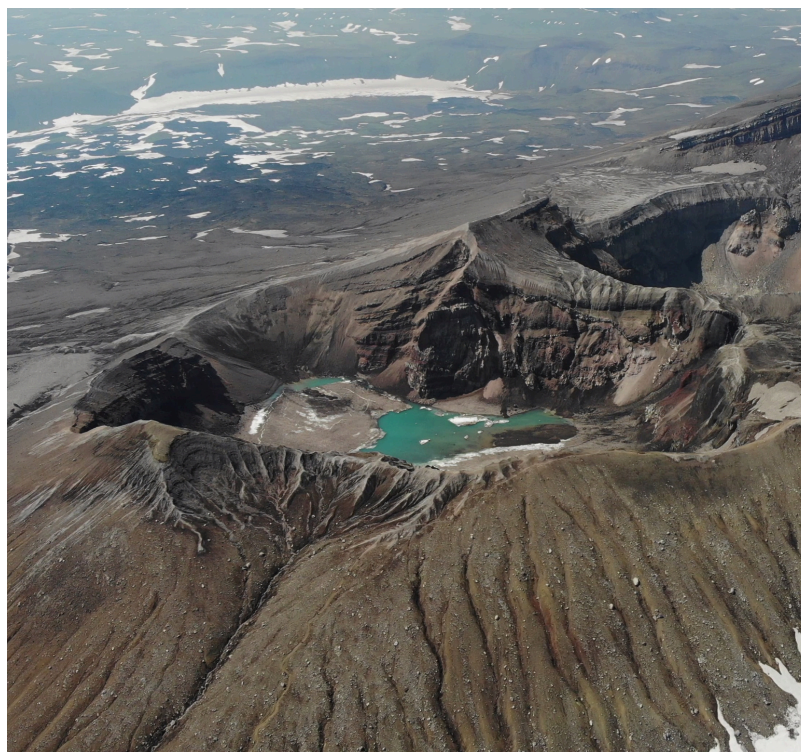


KLYUCHEVSKOY NATURE PARK A VOLCANIC PLAYGROUND

Twelve volcanoes—four of them highly active—stand within the borders of Klyuchevskoy Nature Park. This volcanic group is one of the most majestic and geologically active on Earth. Rising between 2,500 and nearly 5,000 meters, the terrain is dramatic: lava fields that resemble moonscapes, right beside vibrant alpine meadows and birch forests.

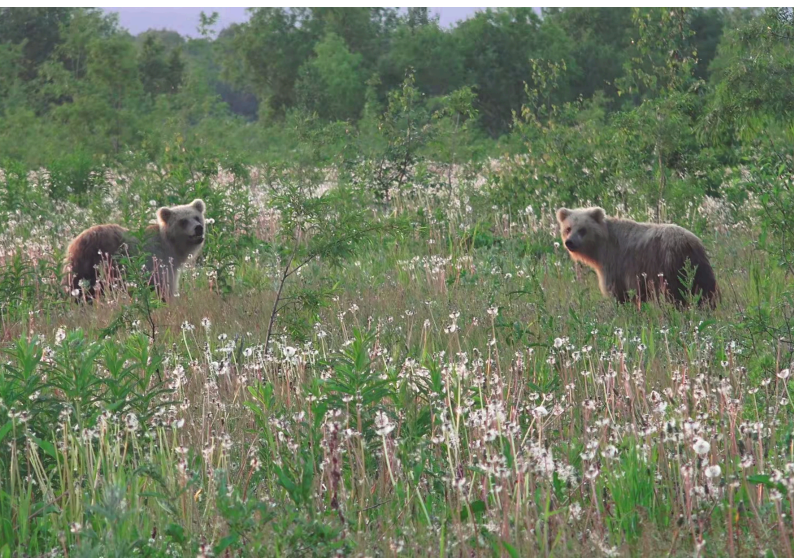
We spent several days exploring this otherworldly land, accessible only by off-road vehicle—and only with experienced drivers. The rugged terrain became our adventure playground. Powerful winds pulled us up volcanic cones, and we soared above crimson and charcoal craters. It felt like flying in Meduno, Italy—just without the grass.

One crater in particular caught our eye. A short hike led us to its rim. From the depths, steam hissed from jagged rock fissures, carrying strange sulfurous smells. The beauty was haunting—and unsettling. At takeoff, we could feel heat radiating through our boots. I was relieved to be airborne.



BEARS, SALMON, AND SURPRISES

Kamchatka's wildlife is as impressive as its volcanoes. In these vast, sparsely inhabited regions, animals thrive. No matter where we pitched our tents, bear and moose droppings were never far away. Even at a mountain pass over 3,000 meters high, we spotted a wolverine loping across the tundra. We saw foxes, marmots, ground squirrels, and hares. But the stars of the show were the Kamchatka brown bears—ten of them, seen and admired from safe distances. In the rivers, we spotted salmon and trout the size of our arms. On a boat trip along the coast, we watched orcas glide past and sea lions roar from the rocks. Birds of every size and color flitted around us—wildlife encounters at every turn.



WHY YOU NEED A GUIDE

Traveling through Kamchatka without a guide? Nearly impossible. Roads are rough or non-existent. Rivers must be forded, bogs crossed, and detours navigated. Supplies—food, water, fuel—must be self-managed. And then there are the bears. Our guide made everything smoother—and safer. He handled access permits (a bureaucratic feat in itself), spoke the language, and knew the land and its wildlife intimately. Without him, much of our journey would have been impossible.



Kamchatka is one of the last true wildernesses—a land where nature reigns and adventure begins the moment you arrive. For paragliders, trekkers, wildlife lovers, and dreamers, it offers something rare: the raw, unfiltered feeling of being far from civilization.

It's not an easy trip—but every second is worth it.



GEAR THAT MATTERS

Choosing the right paraglider and harness occupied us for many months. Weight, pack size, suitability for strong winds, and glide performance were important parameters for us. We decided to bring two gliders per person: a small one for the high mountains and a regular one for fun flights. We relied on wings like the Little Cloud GT Light, Level Wings Flame, and Swing Hybrid for their portability and ease of use in the challenging conditions. For more playful flying, we used the BGD Riot and Ozone UL4, which provided the performance we needed for more dynamic flights. In addition, we carried full expedition gear including a tent, sleeping bag, crampons, ice axe, and rope. A satellite-based communication device was extremely important. We also had to bring film and photo equipment, solar panels, and food. And we had to be able to carry all of this ourselves! A real challenge!



THE THREE ENDEAVOURS

Three men, one volcano, one dream of flying. We met at the legendary Red Bull Dolomitenmann in Lienz – where adventure meets performance. Martin, our mastermind, lives for speedgliding, drones, and alpine challenges. Christian – “Düsen” – is our all-rounder, fit and experienced, trusting Martin in the mountains. Klaus is a paragliding veteran with countless hours in the air. Different but complementary, we set our sights on Kamchatka – Martin’s idea – home to the highest active volcanoes in the north. Our goal: to launch straight from the crater into adventure. Flying, for us, is freedom, focus, and the pursuit of moments that take your breath away.■



LIFE IS A JOURNEY

JOANNA POLLUL

HOW A CONVERSATION ABOUT BIKE TRIPS TURNED INTO A STORY ABOUT LIFE ITSELF

On the other side of the screen, Szadam greets me with a cheerful energy that instantly lifts the mood.

He's at a friend's place and turns the camera to show the green fields outside. It's mid-spring — everything looks fresh and in full bloom. The trees are full, the grass is thick and bright, and you can almost feel the air buzzing with life. A storm is on the horizon, though, and we both hope it doesn't cut our conversation short. We begin by talking about Nordkapp. That's where I first met Szadam. After our sailing trip from Tromsø to Alta, we took a comfortable detour in a rented VW camper. Szadam, on the other hand, was cycling. Yes, in winter. To Nordkapp. On a bike. But even that's not the wildest part. Originally, Szadam had planned to cross Siberia — that was the journey he'd been preparing for. But when he was denied entry, he came up with a Plan B. That's how our paths crossed.

Looking back, that brief encounter stuck with me more than I expected. It was one of those moments you don't think much of at the time, but that lingers somewhere in the back of your mind. While reminiscing about our trip to northern Norway, I thought of Szadam and wondered what he'd been up to since. Something about that brief meeting had stayed with me. I had a feeling his story might have grown into something worth sharing — something that deserved to be heard. So I reached out. And the more we talked, the more inspired I felt — not just by the places he's been, but by the way he sees the world. It's funny how life brings certain people back into your orbit, almost as if by design.



THE COLDEST

These days, many people travel by bike, with side bags carrying all the essentials — and that alone is a challenge due to the weight. But Szadam had much more to contend with: freezing temperatures and dangerously icy roads. The route leading directly to Nordkapp is maintained by massive snowploughs, but even those can't always keep up — sometimes the road is closed entirely due to severe weather. Just like us, Szadam was lucky that day. The sun was shining, and the road was open — a rare window of calm that allowed anyone bold enough to venture that far north a chance to reach the edge of the world. After a short walk along the Nordkapp cliffs, we spotted a guy with a bike packed to the brim. That alone was a surprise — even more so when we found out he was also Polish (as me and my brother). We talked briefly, took some photos, exchanged contacts, and went our separate ways. On our drive back, we saw him again, waving as we passed through the white “deserts.” We honked in support as we drove by. He admits that while it wasn't quite Siberia, it was still a grueling challenge.

“When we met, the sun was shining,” I recall. “But the wind was already picking up,” adds Szadam. “I fell so many times. My bike weighed 40 kilos, and yet the wind tossed me like a matchstick.”

Finding a good place to set up camp was nearly impossible — everything was buried in snow. “Sometimes I had to sleep in parking lots.”



THE SUN WAS SHINING, AND THE ROAD WAS OPEN — A RARE WINDOW OF CALM THAT ALLOWED ANYONE BOLD ENOUGH TO VENTURE THAT FAR NORTH A CHANCE TO REACH THE EDGE OF THE WORLD.



HOW IT STARTED



But Szadam's story is not just about biking. It's about more than gear, money (which he often lacked), or even a working phone — which, for a time, he didn't have at Nordkapp. For him, cycling became a way to reclaim a kind of freedom he'd never known before. There's something rare about Szadam, especially in our fast-paced, hyper-connected world. Where many people walk with their heads down, rushing through life, he — even when speaking of hardships — smiles. There's light in his voice.

I ask him how it all began.

"My first real bike trip was when I was 11 years old. I ran away to my grandmother's house," he says with a grin. "I biked a lot as a kid. But it was four years ago, while I was still living in Germany, that everything changed. I experienced a shift in consciousness, and my life turned around completely. After a while, I told my family I was quitting my job. I said that once my daughter turned 18, I was going to get on my bike and go on the journey of a lifetime. They thought I had totally lost my mind."

He admits that, after years of battling depression — and even being hospitalized for it — their reaction wasn't entirely unreasonable.

FLOW WITHIN THE MAROCCAN HEAT



His first inspiration came from reading *The Pilgrimage* — and that's how the idea of biking to Santiago de Compostela was born. "I always dreamed of drinking tea with nomads in the Sahara," he adds. So, after Santiago, he headed to Morocco. It was in Morocco that he really learned how to ride. "Riding is an art. I'd been cycling all my life, but only in Morocco — in the mountains, in 50-degree heat — did I finally get it. One day, riding uphill, I just snapped. I stopped feeling tired. My muscles synchronized. My body and bike became one. I crossed some invisible line, and suddenly, I was riding with ease." The Moroccan desert, the Sahara, the High Atlas Mountains — especially in summer — are places very few people dare to cycle. It's an extreme expedition.

THE HIGHEST

"My goal was to go where it's hottest, highest, and coldest," Adam says. "And I did that — though Siberia still waits for me."

We had already been to the hottest and one of the coldest places — so what about the highest? "For that, I went to India. I started in the south and cycled all the way north, aiming to reach the highest motorable pass in the world. Along the way, I fell ill many times. It wasn't easy, but now I'm forged by the experience. I started in Tiruvannamalai at the southern tip of India, traveled along the west coast, and finally reached the Himalayas. The idea of biking in India was sparked by my motorcycle trip from Manali to Leh back in 2004. When I began, I had 5,572 km to ride in 70 days. The elevation gain was around 31,180 meters, mostly thanks to the four highest motorable passes, each over 5,000 meters. I also had monsoon rains ahead... and back then, anything could come at me — including 40-degree heat."

Eventually, he made it to the legendary Khardung La — often called the "Top of the World."

Khardung La sits in the Ladakh Range, about 40 kilometers from Leh, at an altitude of over 5,000 meters. While it was originally believed to be 5,602 meters high, newer measurements show it's actually around 5,359 meters — which cost it the title of the highest motorable pass. Still, reaching it — especially by bike — is no small feat.

In the end, the mountains care the least whether they're the highest or not. It's us humans who feel the need to conquer such heights — and who often pressure others to beat our own records.

The other, maybe even more important goal, was to get to know himself through difficult experiences.

"For me, traveling means that you have a general idea of where you're going — but not exactly. You have a rough direction, but you just ride, set up your tent, sleep, and keep going. After everything I've experienced on these journeys, nothing scares me anymore. Heat, cold, exhaustion, insects... it doesn't matter. I'm also no longer interested in sightseeing. You can explore the whole world, but if you don't get to know yourself, it means nothing.

The most important journey is also the shortest — and at the same time, the longest. It covers just about 40 centimeters: from the mind to the heart. To quiet the mind and quiet the heart — that's the real journey."

A storm interrupted our call.



A JOURNEY WITHIN, A CHALLENGE AHEAD

"After returning from my trip to India, I became homeless. I had a dream that my wife wanted to separate — and it turned out to be true. I'm still kind of homeless, but for the first time, I feel at home. I feel free. But freedom is not just about doing what you please. Freedom is when you take responsibility for your own thoughts, words, and actions. To truly know, you have to feel."

Sometimes, the tears came. Along the way, I met angels — people who supported me throughout my journey, often when I needed it most.

"I traded my suit and tie for bike screws and grease. Nowadays, I work as a tour guide and in a bike repair shop. I'll also be giving talks about my travels — not just the ones on a bicycle, but the one that happens within." When it comes to preparing for Siberia, things get a lot more serious.

"There's a lot more to take care of," Szadam explains. "You need jackets rated for minus 60 degrees, medicine for frostbite, fuel that won't freeze... You can't afford to forget a single item. Out there, it's tough. The cold doesn't kill you from the outside — it kills you from the inside. It can suffocate you." He tells me that the route he's planning to take has only been attempted by a few people in winter.

"I even got a letter from the authorities suggesting I should go in April instead of January — but that's not my plan," he says with a grin. "Even the gear reacts differently. Inner tubes crack from the cold," Adam says. "You have to change them in a truck — you can't do it with bare hands out there. You pitch your tent, put on your down gear, and wait for some help to come..."

He pauses, then smiles:

"But I'll tell you more about that next year." Before wrapping up, I ask what's harder — cycling in extreme heat or extreme cold?

"Heat is worse than cold," Adam answers without hesitation. "You black out, get dehydrated, sick. The heat cuts you off completely."

Apart from the heat, one of the hardest parts of cycling in India was food poisoning.

"It hit me a few times," says Adam. "And then there were mosquitoes that can kill, snakes, spiders... India wasn't easy."



MORE THAN JUST A RIDE

I also ask him what advice he'd give to anyone dreaming of bicycle travel.

"Just get on the bike and ride," he says simply. For him, it's not about the perfect plan, but freedom — the feelings the journey brings, and the people you meet.

We continue chatting for a while about people, different cultures, and customs. When I ask Adam which place had the kindest people, he replies without hesitation: "Morocco. I could always count on help. Strangers often gave me food, we talked, and sometimes they even invited me in. I could take a bath. But honestly, I feel like I am always lucky. I usually found support wherever I went. In Norway, people are a bit more reserved, but even there, one guy stopped, invited me into his car to warm up — and I even got a pizza. There's still so much good in the world."



I still believe that too.

The world is changing fast — and not always for the better. Some places have lost their sense of humility, and stress is becoming overwhelming. People are growing more aggressive, more blind to what's truly worth their energy. True values are slowly fading. In the end, we need to look for the best in ourselves and live with intention — guided by spirit. It's not worth exhausting ourselves chasing what is, by nature, fleeting. The most important thing is to look within and bring out the best we have to offer the world. "And one more thing," Adam adds. "Faith. I want people to believe in themselves." He smiles. "Because life is a journey — and it's faith that helps us get through it."



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DESERT DIARIES: A WINTER ROAD TRIP THROUGH OMAN

BARTOSZ WAROT

Oman impressed us deeply. Its diverse landscapes, mild winter weather, and safe, clean, tourist-friendly atmosphere—especially for wild camping—made it an ideal escape from grey Polish winters. Over two weeks, we traveled over 2,500 km in white Toyota LC300s, equipped with rooftop tents and a mix of camping gear and suitcases. Three families, each with different travel experience, explored Oman without guides or tours. Despite months of planning, we had to skip many spots—there was never enough time. As the group's guide, I constantly weighed decisions: was it worth visiting certain spots, how long to stay in the desert, or if the rain might flood us in one of the wadis. I also questioned whether the next place would be as beautiful as the last, and if everyone was enjoying it as much as I was. The answer always came clearly—only in hindsight. We chose quality over quantity. With short winter days,

we slowed down to savor moments rather than rush. Oman is vast, and while it's tempting to see more, we found that less often meant more meaning. Enjoying the present brought more joy and relaxed our trip. Eventually, only two families finished the journey together. We covered over 2,500 kilometers, mostly on gravel and sand tracks. We camped in mountains, wadis, deserts, and on stunning beaches of varying colors. We drove along shores later flooded by the ocean, swam in turquoise seas and white lagoons, hiked mountains and valleys, and observed turtles, birds, goats, camels, and local customs. Oman's terrain is over 70% mountainous, filled with countless rock formations and colors. We bathed in hot springs and icy streams, visited oases, got stuck in the sand, and built nightly campfires despite limited wood. Exhausted, we slept early and woke to breathtaking sunrises—each day a blank page, ready for new memories.

I'll skip most of the prep—very different from standard road trips or organized tours. With our own car, we just pack as much as possible. In organized trips, you can rely on help or borrow things, but limited luggage means we usually overpack. After arriving in Muscat and hauling four heavy 20-kg suitcases, I knew we had a problem. My son had only a few pants, a shirt, and a sweatshirt for 14 days. I packed too much gear for the car, which was the heaviest load. Muscat greeted us with palms, dry 27°C air, sunshine, and the sweaty smell of travel layers. We were welcomed with a sign bearing my name, escorted to the car park, and quickly sorted out currency and SIM cards—all efficient despite our travel fatigue. We immediately started unloading gear:

hard pillows, big pots, grills, even a spare sleeping bag—all tossed to make room for suitcase number three. Everything, kids and ice chest included, had to fit into our new Land Cruiser 300, a shiny petrol model with just 10,000 km. We also had a diesel “black sheep” LC, which broke down near the end—much to Mariusz’s dismay. Our oldest gear was the tents—big fabric models with firm mattresses—our “palaces” for most nights. The first night was in a hotel, where we ditched one heavy suitcase and one empty one for more space. Still, I missed my Offlander organizers and our usual camper setup—especially the more compact Fold 4 tent. No complaints, though. Great weather, a healthy and ready group, the flight behind us, and a solid plan with a well-matched team.



FIRST WADI

A few years ago, I visited my first Wadi in Jordan—narrow, rocky, trash-filled, and dry. But this one is different. On day one, we head to Wadi Far, leaving late as we adjust to the unhurried pace—especially in the midday heat. It's winter, thankfully. We admire the first tall minarets and the grove surrounding the fort from the mountain side. Plans change early—we won't reach the Wadi Far camp as planned. Instead, we take a scenic gravel detour north from Wakan. The mountains glow in the sunset. Time slips away. Our first camp—almost in the dark.



Is this a Wadi? It's huge, flat, rocky, and mostly dry—just as I expected. Palm trees and tall grass dot the landscape. The Wadi narrows toward the water, and we push north, finding a campsite among palms that offer morning shade, kid hideouts, and firewood.

Morning brings joy. I walk the Wadi. Ewa does yoga. The kids sleep off the previous night's adventures in their secret palm base. We swim in the stream, then pack up and split into two groups for the rest of the trip. Mariusz and I drive back with a bit of flair—splashing through water, scraping over rocks.

SNAKES

We head for Rustaq Fort and nearby hot springs—both closed. Maybe it's for the best. We linger nearby with coffee and conversation, chatting about expat life, Omani-Indian ties, and the magic of local coffee. A quick stop for supplies, a fuel-up, and an instantly regretted Pakistani take-away. Next: "Little Snake" valley—nothing like the Wadis before. The asphalt ends, and dramatic stone waves rise around us. Gravel begins, and doesn't let up for days. We skip the trek and wading, opting for a scenic camp on the far side. Icy dips in the water, dodging goats on ledges,

kids echoing their bleats—it becomes a chorus. I sneak in a solo walk. The landscape is muted and wild—ancient layers in soft browns and greys. I climb a jagged path half-following goat tracks. Darkness nears. Camp sits 500 meters from a lake. Rain is forecast, slopes tilt toward our tents, and stars vanish behind clouds.

Morning arrives dim and heavy. After a short walk, we pack up and head toward Al Hamra for Christmas Eve dinner, with a quick stop at "Big Snake" valley. It's steep, dramatic—natural waterslides carved by time. We stop at a sudden drop into an icy pool. The kids are soaked. We turn back—it wouldn't be safe to go on and return later. The road ahead is rougher than it looks. Bone-jarring tracks turn the Land Cruiser beige. The kids draw shapes. Trails, hearts, and "KOK"—a mystery that becomes our lucky sign. Despite clouds, the views are breathtaking.



A pale track threads through brown ridges, then swallows us between cliffs. Sun breaks through, painting the canyon gold. The terrain wears us down. Basia knows when to pause and reset. Bruno stays quiet, enduring the bumps. When a door light flickers, I assume he's fiddling—until I spot him in the mirror, head out the window, puffing his cheeks, silently asking permission. I nod. He lets out a long, joyful whoosh of breath—his own balloon release. We all fall still, holding the quiet of that moment.

NEXT STOP: THE DESERT

We need supplies—wood, water, fuel, ice—for a few days. We also can't split up because we only have one compressor, one set of recovery gear, and three walkie-talkies that no longer work. And they only charge from a 220V socket. Perfect. Also, Krzysiek has our frying pan.

I go shopping and look for firewood, trusting Mario will catch up. We reunite in Bidiyah at the desert's edge, grab supplies, and push on as night falls, pretending we are not starving or exhausted. Dust, headlights, and strangers offering to guide us to a "super camp." We decline, deflate tires, and head in—driving until the signal fades.

But where's Krzysiek? Distracted by the "vivid images" in a restaurant gallery back in Nizwa—at least that's how we joke later—he gets lost.

Thankfully, some Omanis find him wandering in the dark and bring him to us. Meanwhile, I learn my first real lesson about an unmodified vehicle. I get stuck, make rookie mistakes, and realize I'm too tired to keep pushing. This place is "good enough."

Once we're all together, we light a fire. At first, the wind howls, and we hear cars heading back to town. We haven't gone far—just two dunes away from the main track. But soon the wind dies, the cars fade, and silence takes over. Above us is a sky bursting with stars, with a faint glow from the nearby town. Our shadows dance in the flickering firelight. We have a small visitor. A desert mouse—maybe the only one—tiny, with oversized ears, dashes fearlessly between our legs. It often stops by the fire, gazing into the flames. I can see its tiny face and shiny black eyes blinking in the light. We squeal like kids every time it scurries past.

In the morning, its tracks are everywhere. It's been busy. So has the sand—it's also everywhere. That's when it really hits us: we're in the desert. During the night, we saw only what our headlights revealed. Ewa and I drag ourselves out for sunrise—not so eagerly, still worn out from the long day and a sleepless night. Only sheer willpower—and a full bladder—pushes us out of the tent. We head toward the tallest dunes, rewarded with an unforgettable view over the valley and a second ridge of towering dunes.



Later we'll realize that this desert is shaped like that throughout: long parallel dunes cut by sand-filled canyons. Tomorrow we'll make several attempts to break through to the south—none successful. Desert sunrises are among the most beautiful I've ever seen. The sand shifts in color—from pale grey, to warm brown, to molten gold, and eventually to a blinding silver shimmer. At night, it becomes a vast, black abyss.

WAHIBA SANDS

Officially, it's now called the Sharqiya Sands—Wahiba being the name of the local tribe—but I prefer the original, and that's how it stays in my memory. Wahiba Sands—like a rooftop tent bolted to the back of a pickup. Deserts always pull me in. There's something about the vastness stretching endlessly left and right. A hint of fear too—of getting stuck, of running out of water. But this one is different. It's cut through by sandy canyons visible even on satellite maps, and full of surprises. In the middle: a golden-roofed mosque, glowing in the sun. We pass luxury camps, abandoned huts, and camels—roaming free or riding in Toyota 79s, watching as we dig ourselves out of the sand. Most of the day is spent trying to cross to the next canyon. Each time we think we've made it, another dune rises ahead. The kids sandboard nearby, laughter echoing between slopes. By late afternoon, the dunes soften. Shrubs appear. We see goats, sheep—even cows. We're sunburnt, tired, and scorched. The desert takes it all. Night falls windy again. The stars are rearranged here—foreign to us, brighter. The Milky Way stretches clearly across a sky without a single trace of light pollution.



KITES

Since drones are heavily restricted here, I'd strap a 360° camera to a kite. With built-in stabilization and panoramic footage, I could later extract perfect drone-like shots. Clever, right? I even imagined towing it behind the car on a special reinforced line (which, naturally, I bought). After an hour of tangled lines and frustration, I sat there, dreaming of a real drone. Oman's landscapes deserve it. Maybe next time. For the next few kilometers, we drive along the beach—cliffs to our right, endless sand, and plastic debris scattered by the sea. We pretend not to notice. That practiced adult reflex—stoic, selective indifference—anything not to ruin the moment.



Carrying on, we find beached fishing boats greet us, shaped like pirate ships. Rusted-out trucks straight from a post-apocalyptic movie—cab frames stripped bare, windows gone, tires bald, a spare strapped on the hood like a battering ram. Around them, tangled fishing nets, dinghies, tools—everything baking in the sun. A scene so surreal it feels staged. We park our pristine white Toyotas right beside it all.



OMANI MALEDIVES

I debated whether it was worth driving so far north to Barr al-Hikman—crossing all that nothing, wasting hours in transit. But when I saw the white beach and a lagoon with two wooden huts, I knew this would be the highlight of our trip. The turning point, even. But mostly: the peak.

After checking out a nearby kiteboarding bar and camp, we easily find a perfect place to stay. Ocean on one side, a mirror-like lagoon on the other. Within minutes, we're all set up. Everyone scatters—kids dash between the beach and the lagoon, chasing crabs, digging in white sand, collecting shells and sea-tossed treasures.

The beach feels different from all others in Oman. Clean. Quiet. There's swimming, lounging, and a sunset melting into the sea. Later, a bonfire and great company. Pure joy. We spot birds—gulls, black herons, flamingos, and entire flocks of smaller ones I can't name. They come alive at dawn, and so do I. Mario soon pays for his beach-driving spree—splashing through water, flooring it, hitting “PWR” like a man possessed. The diesel engine starts choking.

I may have just gotten lucky. In the petrol model, the air filter is tucked safely away. In the diesel? Perfectly positioned to suck in salty ocean mist. The filter swells and clogs; white residue coats the engine bay.

We try everything—washing, scrubbing, drying it with the exhaust pipe, even rinsing it in the ocean with dish soap. No shop, not even Toyota, has a replacement. Then the real blow: the car won't run without the filter. A glaring design flaw—and we're stuck with it.

The signs were there: the petrol car suddenly outpacing the diesel, or our near-failed climb up seaside cliffs—ironically, right where we first soaked the engine. The car with the tow rope was long gone, and we were sinking into the sand.



We didn't let the failing diesel ruin our final days.

The last two nights by the coast were spent in completely different places. The first: sandy cliffs – golden, dramatic, but noisy with fishermen and diesel fumes. Sleep was hard, but morning made up for it: yoga, kids digging in sand, and me quietly absorbing the ocean one last time.

The second spot felt like a post-apocalyptic film set. A flat cliff above a remote beach where turtles lay their eggs and predators scavenge them. We'd spent the whole day driving the coast without much luck, then returned here for isolation.

Exhaustion and a bit of social tension had us in bed early, but morning softened everything – we saw turtles, played in foamy waves, and the worst camp turned into the best in a blink.

Looking back through photos and footage, I know Oman is one of the most diverse and fascinating countries I've visited. You can go from mountains to desert to beach in a single day. Highly recommended.■



The kite may have failed, but the trip video is still worth a watch!

SHARE YOUR STORY WITH US, SHARE IT WITH THE WORLD!

What began as a two-person project has steadily expanded—and with this issue, we're excited to feature even more voices. A growing group of authors have joined us in shaping MAPU TALES, and we couldn't be happier to share their stories. We hope this space continues to grow, and we'd love to hear yours too. Every journey has a story worth telling—so....

WHAT'S YOUR TALE?

GOT A PERFECT SHOT?

Tell your story by sending us a picture for the photo of the issue.

PEAK DISTRICT FOR CLIMBERS AND GUMBIES

KAT MAZURKIEWICZ



MORE THAN JUST VERTICALS – WEATHER-DRIVEN DAYS IN THE PEAK DISTRICT



...it's me. I'm a sport climber and a gumbly. I've been climbing recreationally for the better part of a decade now, and for most of that time I've also occasionally dabbled in trad climbing.

I first visited the Peak District in May 2024, having recently acquired an English partner — Peak being the decent climbing spot closest to his hometown. That first week of walking and climbing made me fall in love almost instantly. I returned in June 2025, armed with my first (own) set of friends and hoping to get enough climbing done to cover multiple pages — but this piece ended up as more of a general overview: on arrival, we were greeted by a heatwave, immediately followed by a few days of rain — neither constituting prime grit conditions...

CLIMBING

Let me open with a little warning to all of you who only do sport climbing: the Peak District is primarily known for its grit (a hard, top quality type of sandstone) which is primarily reserved for trad climbing. Sport climbing spots, especially those offering lower grades, are nearly exclusively disused limestone quarries.

That being said - there's still a lot of fun to be had! The UK has a bit of a reputation when it comes to views on trad vs sport, but there's quite a few people actively working to make it a thing of the past. If you're driving through the area or visiting for walking - do consider taking your gear. The quarries are numerous and the largest ones offer so many routes in a broad range of grades that it's going to take much more than just the occasional outing to run out of options. The quality of rock understandably varies and helmets are advised or even required in most locations, but the popular venues will have large solid, enjoyable sections.

The only quarry I've personally climbed in is Horseshoe Quarry near Eyam. Unfortunately, I hadn't thought to take any pictures until it was too late, so you'll have to take my word for it when I say that it's massive. Owned and maintained by the British Mountaineering Council, its protection is quite new, installed in 2019, and spaced rather comfortably. Most routes have a fixed anchor at the top, there's even practice anchors on the ground. The quarry's size lends itself to the impression of quiet and seclusion - you forget you're rather close to a road and parties tend to be spread over a large area, which means more (perceived) privacy and no need for queuing like it sometimes happens in smaller popular crags. Harpur Hill (near Buxton) seems to have similar advantages, including size.

If you climb trad at any level - PD is the place to be! (For legal reasons, this is an opinion and I have met people who did not share it). It's peppered with gritstone escarpments, the most famous of which - Stanage Edge - is three miles (nearly 5km) long!

Needless to say, since it was the closest to our accommodation, we've never felt the need to venture past it. It's divided into 3 prominent sections, each of which features a ton of very easy climbs and ones that should only pose a slight challenge to the recreational trad climber (of course, higher grades are also abundant). If you've never climbed in grit, it might take you a bit of time to adjust. The friction is amazing, once you remember to trust it. The formations and hold shapes fall somewhere between granite and the soft, slopey, flowy features of "ordinary" continental sandstone. Stanage Edge is rather popular with both climbers and walkers.



Most routes in the lower grades will have good, obvious protection placements. Depending on your travel route or accommodation, other famous, popular destinations (with the same rock type) include: Burbage, Curbar Edge, Froggatt Edge and The Roaches. All of them are primarily single-pitch areas, with routes ranging from a few to 25-30 meters long. Climbers typically use double ropes (often one strand folded in half for the shorter routes), with the leader constructing an anchor on top of the cliff and belaying the follower from above, after which both parties walk or scramble down. Just a tip - the first time I led a route at Stanage, the "British" way of sitting at the cliff edge and belaying a second from a device clipped into your belay loop suddenly made so much sense! The best gear placements are a bit removed from the edge, so clipping your device into the anchor creates a lot of unnecessary rope drag. Not pictured, on the other end of the rope: a continental climber in the process of finding out why the Brits do things the way they do.



LET'S TALK NUMBERS

Let's address the elephant in the room, though — the British grading system. I'll start by quoting Leo Houlding's *Closer to the Edge*:

"Climbs are always graded for the very hardest section. The first part is reference to the overall difficulty and danger of the route, the second part, known as the technical grade, represents the single hardest move. It is all rather confusing in the lower standards but becomes a little clearer once reaching Extreme (E) grades. These span from E1 to E11. Normally an E1 would be 5b, an E11, 7a. A lower technical grade such as E1 5a suggests that the route may be quite bold; conversely a higher one, E1 5c, likely means there will be a single hard move that is well protected."

The recreational and/or sport climber, however, won't always feel comfortable leading a trad 5b first thing off the plane, so I heavily recommend accustoming yourself to the system by means of experiment. Start off with the absolute easiest (Difficult — often used as descent routes and soloed) and work your way up until you find a sweet spot that balances comfort and excitement to your liking. Don't get too frustrated with yourself — I've encountered some locals that have confessed they're still struggling to completely understand the system!

For boulderers, there's a lot to do in the vicinity of Stanage, Burbage, Curbar, and The Roaches. All of those include easy grades, but some of the blocs are quite high. I recommend doing some research online and consulting guidebooks when making your choice.



WALKING

There's quite a lot of circular walks you can look up online depending on your preferences; however, I do recommend double checking how much of a walk follows roads because some are notoriously bad in that department. You can usually reroute using footpaths though. It's very useful to have a GPS app or at least a paper map - the network of footpaths covering the area is quite dense in most places and it's rather easy to take a wrong turn. Fortunately the density also means that you can usually amend your mistakes without having to turn back. The trails are also not colour coded. The footpaths will more often than not cross pastures, so get used to opening gates and latches or climbing over fences. There's stiles built in or over where the footpath actually needs to go over - please don't cross elsewhere. Peak District footpaths are usually clearly marked. Popular walking destinations include: any of the Edges (Stanage, Burbage, Froggatt), Kinder Scout (the highest point of the entire PD), Mam Tor and neighbouring hills, the Monsal Trail (centered around discontinued railway features like tunnels and bridges) and for flatter, less demanding walks - the Peak Cavern (aka The Devil's Arse), Little John's Grave, the Derwent Dam and the Ladybower Reservoir.





In the picture you can see the bridge over Ladybower Reservoir seen from a hill above. The hill walks are numerous and easily shortened or extended; for a lot of them, the largest physical effort is required at the very beginning when you have to get from the valley up to the ridge, which you then follow with much smaller fluctuations in elevation and one larger descent at the end. Picture below shows the landscape somewhere along the ridge between Mam Tor and Lose Hill.



The Derwent Dam circular is rather well planned, with informative plaques placed every now and again - you can learn the history of the dam, the reservoir and the now submerged village of Derwent. That one and the paths around Ladybower Reservoir feature little “road signs” to keep you informed about the remaining length and time.

WHAT IF IT RAINS?

Both Sheffield and Manchester have a few large climbing gyms; some of them, like The Climbing Works, of international fame. All of them will require you to fill in a questionnaire and answer a few basic questions, potentially also demonstrate your basic skills like tying a knot and secure belaying if you're in for rope climbing. Below you can see The Foundry climbing gym. Even with the feature wall getting reworked, it still has more than enough lead routes for a day's session. Apart from the oldschool bouldering wall seen on the right, it has a small modern bouldering area upstairs.



We've also walked in the rain because... well, why not? Just make sure your shoes can handle it. Supposedly England doesn't get many thunderstorms, so there's no danger in venturing out in less than ideal weather. Locally, there's a swimming pool in Hathersage, a museum nearby (The David Mellor Cutlery Factory and Design Museum) and the Chatsworth estate near Bakewell features not only a hundred-acre garden (complete with a farmyard and playground for the little ones), but its centerpiece is a historic house holding a large art gallery in its 25 rooms. Eyam boasts a bubonic plague museum after having half its population wiped out in the 1660s.





Climbing:

- sport: a rather extensive topo (not just for Peak) can be found for free at **sportclimbs.uk**
- trad: if you're briefly visiting and not sure if you'll return, then the **Rockfax** Pokketz guides are the answer. There's two of them - Peak NE and Peak SE - featuring a choice of the easier routes (Mod to HVS) plus a few E1 for aspiring climbers, and they're a third of the price of a regular guidebook. Those who climb harder or plan to return might prefer one of the numerous Rockfax, Wired and other self-published guides. All of them are available online, although there's (understandably) more UK websites than international ones. A selection is also available in local shops like Outside or Jo Royle (see below).
- bouldering: I believe there's some content on **27crags** and paper guidebooks exist as well. The Foundry in Sheffield and Alpkite (any location, need to phone one day ahead) do pad rental if you don't want to travel with yours or spontaneously decide to venture out.

Walking:

We found the **Alltrails app** very useful, even after our free trial had expired - not only does it come with a lot of pre-set walks of all lengths and difficulties, it has all the local footpaths mapped and allows you to plan your own trek or edit an existing one. There's a lot of car parks all over the area and you can usually avoid walking on paved roads for too long when approaching your trail of choice.

Food:

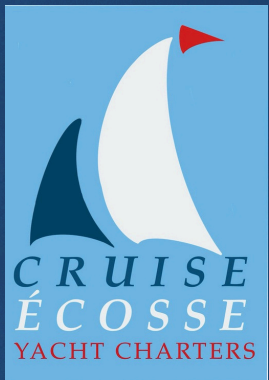
- Prices & availability: A typical meal out ranges from £10 (for a minimalist breakfast or lunch) to £20 (for a larger dinner) per person—broadly in line with UK city prices (excluding London, which is notoriously overpriced). The area is full of cafés and pubs aimed at tourists, so finding food is easy... unless you're vegetarian. In that case, it's worth checking menus in advance—especially if you're a picky eater—to avoid disappointment.
- Cafés: Generally better for meat-free options. Most serve breakfast and lunch only, and typically close around 3–4pm.
- Pubs: Open in the evenings, but vegetarian choices are usually limited to the same few staples. Dishes also tend to be on the heavier, greasier side—a common issue across rural England.
- Recommendations: **Open House (café)** in Hathersage (some rando's Google review below will tell you why - spoiler: the prices are the exact same as anywhere else in a popular tourist location). **The Old Nags Head (pub)** that might not have a wide veggie selection on the menu, but I have to commend them on each special having a vegetarian option - and on the food quality as well.

Shops:

(I'm only writing about the central Peak, obviously all larger towns/cities on the outskirts will have more options):

- **Outside, Hathersage** - the only one I've visited in person - I think it's not an overstatement when I say this one has, or at least used to have, a cult status, especially among climbers. It's certainly impressive beyond expectations, offering a very wide variety of camping, walking, running and climbing gear and clothing - climbing has its own dedicated room in the back. As an independent shop, it has a larger markup (or should I say, a smaller "discount" relative to the manufacturer prices) than chain places, which is also noticeable online - but they do have some bargains. Moreover, should you find yourself in need of a guidebook, they stock most leading publications and you might have to take some time deciding.
- **Alpkite, Hathersage** - one of 11 locations of a small UK chain. Lots of equipment crammed into an unassuming shop: walking, cycling, camping, bouldering (they sell pads and chalk bags) and all of their clothing (for said activities plus climbing) is their own brand, while Outside focuses on big, recognizable names. I also found myself impressed that they provide a wash and repair service - unfortunately, it's an online only thing!
- **Jo Royle, Buxton** - small business with rather unfortunate opening hours (10am to 3pm) with mostly walking and camping gear plus a bit of climbing - primarily guidebooks.
- **The Valley Rambler, Hope** - family business mostly focusing on equipment you might need for walking and camping.





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CAMPING IN DENMARK WITH KIDS



DÉBORA LARA SALVATIERRA

Traveling in a campervan with kids isn't just about getting from one place to another. It's about living adventures together, creating unforgettable memories, and rediscovering the world through our children's eyes. For us, this journey started in Kraków and led us all the way to Denmark, filled with landscapes, emotions, and moments we'll never forget.

BALTIC MAGIC

Our first stop was Rogowo, where we stayed at SeaCamp Rogowo. Surrounded by greenery and just steps from the sea, the campsite had a trampoline and playground that kept Sara happily entertained for hours. But for us, coming back to Rogowo meant much more. Before the pandemic, we used to spend part of our summers here. Returning years later felt like closing a beautiful circle. We had fried cod at a harbor restaurant, just like we used to, and the taste brought back so many memories.

The sea, the sand, the laughter... it all felt like home again. The cold waters of the Baltic reminded me of the Pacific back in my hometown of Lima. Sara, as always, dove right into the waves, completely unfazed by the chill. With the strong winds, we flew our kite by the shore, and those simple moments became pure joy.



We drove through Germany, stopping at camper-only parking spots—some even had playgrounds, which made the breaks extra fun for Sara.

When we reached Denmark, we discovered places that felt like scenes from a storybook. Up north, we visited the Hjørring Lighthouse and Grenen, where the North Sea meets the Baltic Sea. To get there, you walk about 1 km from the Skagens Museum parking lot, along the coast. Along the way, you might see seals resting on the sand or swimming, and when we reached the point where the two seas meet, it was deeply moving—a quiet, awe-filled moment. Sara was so excited, she said she felt like an explorer discovering a brand-new land.

At the Hanstholm-Vigsø and Thisted-Klitmøller beaches, we explored World War II bunkers, which sparked Sara's curiosity. In Lindholm Høje, we wandered through an ancient Viking cemetery with free admission and signs explaining Viking life. It turned into a spontaneous history class—right there in the open air.



One of the most magical days was at the Nordsøen Oceanarium in Hirtshals, the largest aquarium in Northern Europe. Kids receive a passport, and the challenge is to get all the stamps at various exhibits. When Sara got hers, she didn't stop until she had all the stamps. At the end of the day, with her certificate in hand, she proudly video-called the family to show them her achievement. The oceanarium offers seal feedings, simulators, interactive games, and a marine-themed playground. But beyond the attractions, what stays with us is the look of joy and pride on her face. ■





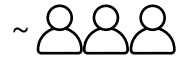
THE GALLEY

JOANNA POLLUL

THE GALLEY, JUST AS THE KITCHEN IN THE HOUSE, IS THE HEART OF THE BOAT —WHERE MEALS, MEMORIES, AND THE OCCASIONAL CHAOS HAPPEN. IT MAY BE SMALL, BUT IT HOLDS A BIG PLACE IN ALL OUR HEARTS!

This summer, the weather tends to be quite capricious here in Central Europe. When the colder days hit, or you've just come back from an exhausting hike, it's a good idea to recharge and warm up your heart and stomach. In this issue's galley, we're sharing something close to our heart – Älplermagronen - Swiss Mac'n'cheese! If you've ever wandered through the vast alpine meadows of Switzerland, you've likely come across this dish in one of the cozy alpine huts. It's a hearty alpine macaroni – simple to prepare and very filling. You'll need "Magronen" or "Hörnli" (macaroni or elbow macaroni), potatoes, cream, bouillon or a bouillon cube, bacon cubes, onion, garlic, grated cheese, and... apple mousse. Yes, really! It might sound a bit odd at first, but once you taste it all together, it just works.

Start by heating water with the bouillon cube. Peel and cut the potatoes into small cubes. Once the water is boiling, add the cream, then the potatoes and macaroni. Cook for about 8 minutes, until the pasta and potatoes have absorbed most of the liquid. Meanwhile, fry chopped onion and garlic in a pan. After a couple of minutes, add the bacon and let it crisp up. Then add the cheese to the mix in the pot and stir until melted and creamy. Pour everything from the pan over the macaroni and potatoes (for vegetarians just omit the bacon cubes). Before serving, top it with a generous spoonful of apple mousse – and enjoy this heavy, hearty mix of Mac'n'cheese'n'potatoes with sweet apples that cut through the richness and make the whole dish feel just a bit lighter and brighter. Et voila!■



- 1 bigger onion
- 1-2 garlic cloves
- 400 g potatoes
- 500 ml vegetable broth (I usually mix water with a bouillon cube)
- 250 g pasta (macaroni or elbow macaroni)
- 200 ml cream 30%
- 0,5 tsp salt
- pinch of black pepper
- apple mousse
- ~100 g cut bacon (bacon cubes)
- ~70 g grated cheese (preferably Gruyère)



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